

## “Solidarity Against Austerity” – Ontario University Workers Coordinating Committee (OUWCC), Coordinated Bargaining Meeting. Friday November 2, Sheraton Centre, Toronto.

Attended by 3903’s Grievance Officer Ryan O’Neill and Research/Recording Officer Greg Flemming. In total, there were approximately 64 people at the meeting from over a half-dozen universities in Ontario, representing different locals made up of teaching faculty, support staff, custodial workers, food service workers, and others.

**There were several documents included in a package that was given to delegates. Members interested in further exploring any of the issues below can contact Greg or Ryan to get copies of these documents.**

### *Opening Plenary and Panel Discussion*

The morning began with some ‘words to live by’ from Joanne Webb, Diversity VP of CUPE Ontario, followed by a panel discussion of the political climate in which we currently find ourselves.

**Fred Hahn** – President of CUPE Ontario – discussed Bill 115 (which severely limits the collective bargaining rights of teachers in Ontario), the proposed ‘protection of public services act’ (PPSA) (which could do similar damage for many more workers in the public sector) , and the proroguing of the Provincial Legislature. In his view the closing of the legislature was a move to avoid the legislative committee mandated to investigate the changes of contempt leveled against the Liberal Government because of their decision to scuttle 2 unpopular power construction plant projects, which cost tax payers billions of dollars. The question of Labour was for the Liberals, in Hahn’s view, secondary to this problem – i.e. an excuse to prorogue. He emphasized the detriments Bill 115 and the PPSA can and could have on Labour and the need to organize against it.

**Brian Blakeley** of the Ontario School Board Coordinating Committee spoke next, discussing some of the factors that led up to the imposition of Bill 115. He briefly described how a the ball was set rolling by a local representing teachers in the English Catholic School Board. They signed off on proposals that helped set the standard for what has since come down from the Government – this after a round of what he called “Black-Box Bargaining” (i.e. bargaining without the participation of their membership, in a closed room). This has since led to charges against the local of a failure in their ‘Duty to Fairly Represent’ (a DFR claim at the Labour Board) and talk of a de-certification campaign. The news was not all bleak, however. Blakeley also discussed a direct-action campaign that has since been put forward by teachers to draw attention to their issues – the ‘taking over’ of Santa Claus parades across Ontario in the form of wearing all red, handing out candy, etc.

The Chair of the OUWCC – **Janice Folk Dawson** – spoke about the Liberal’s failure

to address the underfunding of Universities in their discussion papers on education reform. The Liberals have instead focused on changes to pension plans and other austerity measures. She discussed how non-CUPE locals on some campuses have been signing deals that accept 0% increases, and the need to have better communications with these unions in order to coordinate plans. She emphasized that 'strong militant actions' are what will help us combat austerity.

Past 3903 member and now staffer at the Canadian Federation of Students **Mike Yam** discussed the need to make connections with students on campus in order to address the issues discussed above. While acknowledging that there are student groups in many campuses that are explicitly anti-worker, he emphasized that many students are open to discussion of the issues, if not already on the side of public sector workers.

When asked about the overall objectives of the meeting and the anti-austerity agenda, Hahn said that the short term goal was to stop the attack on collective bargaining, while the long term goal was to roll-back the austerity agenda in it's entirety - i.e. the right-wing agenda of privatizing public services. He held that what was needed was a push to enhance the economic understanding of CUPE Members, using our short tern goals as a lever to get Members involved in a further push for a strengthened, fully funded public sector.

### *University Funding and Privatization*

**Diana Zawadzki** is a PhD candidate in sociology and has been booked-off in order to complete a research project on how universities in Ontario are funded and the implications this has for the future of our institutions. The research project is as of yet incomplete, but she presented her preliminary findings.

The focus of the presentation was the opacity surrounding how federal funding is used by the provinces (i.e. they are mandated to use federal transfers for certain things, but there are no explicit consequences for not using the money as mandated) and a similar opacity when it comes to how universities spend the funds allocated to them.

That is, the legislative acts by which universities are incorporated (e.g. the York University Acts of 1959 and 1965) leave the decisions on how funds are spent to university Senates and Boards of Governors. This means Universities are not accountable to the public or the government, but to themselves. (It was pointed out that there is a tension between the autonomy of research and teaching initiatives and public accountability that needs to be resolved).

Other points of interest include the fact that in the late 60s and early 70s the amount of money allocated to each student (i.e. a 'basic income unit', or BIU) ceased to be an absolute dollar amount (i.e. X dollars per student) and instead became a percentage of the total amount allocated to the university sector; that

there are limits on what the universities can spend their funds on. Things like debt, assisted/sponsored research, and capital projects are not acceptable as objects of funding, potentially opening the door to seeking private partners to fill these gaps.

There was much more to this research, but no space to discuss it here. The presentation can be provided to those Members who would like to know more.

## *Pensions*

**Kevin Skerrit**, CUPE's pension expert, made a 20 minute presentation. He discussed what he saw as 3 recommendations made in the Drummond Report that singled pensions out for attack:

- Pension costs are going to increase; the costs need to be reigned in; recommendation is a hard cap on employer side of contributions to joint pension plans
- This hard cap is not being recommended for universities; in the University Sector the contributions paid are often not split 50/50 between employees and employers; contributions are often a fixed percentage of payroll, and rest falls to employer; Drummond wants 50/50 split in 5 years
- Unlike other areas of the public sector, there is a separate plan at each institution; inefficiencies are seen in the smaller sizes of these plans; the plans should be consolidated

Moves toward the first recommendation have already been made. Apparently we've not seen steps to introduce the second recommendation yet, but we should anticipate something. There have been steps as of May/June for the third recommendation: Bill Morneau has been hired by the Government to give recommendations as to how to do it. We've not seen any recommendations from him yet.

Skerrit focused on Drummond's third recommendation and CUPE's response to it. In 2012 CUPE came forward with proposals for costs savings to pensions, one being a willingness to look at models of consolidation. There are many large pension funds held in the public sector, and they are able to make more gains on the investments they make to maintain the worth of their pension dollars because of the economies of scale they are able to take advantage of. Many of these plans are kept in house – that is they have their own staff, etc., and do not have to hire money-managers from Bay Street, who take a cut of profits. Things in which these pension funds are invested include real estate and infrastructure projects (which Skerrit noted raises questions about ethical investment, including participating in Public-Private Partnerships, or 'P3s'). Some Universities have funds worth to upwards of \$1 billion. Most are much smaller. So, there are arguments to be made for consolidating funds in order to take advantage of economies of scale.

Janice Folk Dawson – Chair of the OUWCC – and Skerrit met with Morneau (the Government’s consultant) in the recent past. The government is thinking of creating a pension fund entity that would be 1) arm’s length from the Government and 2) not for profit. This means not using Bay Street money managers. Skerrit said the prospects of keeping money out of Bay Street (‘which in many ways represents our adversaries’) and of consolidation are interesting, but we also wouldn’t want to Government to have control. Folk Dawson presented a written submission to Morneau (which was included in our meeting packages), which sets out 5 conditions for participating: 1) joint governance; 2) only consolidate assets, nothing else (i.e. not making benefits the same for all pensioners); 3) don’t take money from University plans that feel they are already effective; 4) transparency for CUPE members, where what is happening with investments is disclosed; 5) monies would have to be ‘responsibly invested’ – i.e. take into account environmental and social issues.

There is a gap in the CAs in the University Sector. Skerrit suggests getting a clause that says changes in rates, etc., can only be done with consent of the union. This was achieved at Queens and Guelph Universities recently.

### *Bargaining Proposals*

In the afternoon the room voted on 8 items to have them become bargaining priorities for the next year of negotiations. For whatever reason, this information was not presented in print form, but projected on a screen at the front of the room and explained orally. Originally 5 proposals were put forward. Each were voted on separately and almost unanimously accepted:

- Aiming to have all collective agreements expire and be re-negotiated in the year 2016
- Get language around a fiscal advisory committee into our CAs:
  - The aim of this language is to get a say in the budgeting process of our universities; it would allow locals to grieve if were not included in the budget process; would also make it so that locals would not have to use freedom of information requests to see universities’ actual budgets; it is the first step toward having some control over how money is spent university-wide.
- Employment equity:
  - There was no specific language or areas of concern put forward for this, but it was said that these would be developed and circulated in the future.
- Pensions Language:

- The idea here is to get language that says the university does not just have to consult with locals if they want to make changes to pension plans, but would have to get the union's consent to make changes; it also includes refusing to allow plans that are based on a 50/50 sharing of contributions between employers and employees (see previous notes on pensions).
- Wages:
  - While no specific percentage is being put forward, around 2% was suggested; there was discussion as to whether this should be included as a priority as the media does not deal kindly with the issue of wages, and benefits are more important; it was also pointed out that benefits do not help one cover the cost of inflation as it pertains to rent and food.

After these 5 priorities were passed, 3 more were raised from the floor of the meeting:

- Benefits
- Job Security:
  - Food and service workers are said in government documents to be more precarious and less physically safe than migrant workers; many contract faculty have to re-apply for their jobs 3 times a year; language for this proposal will have to be developed.
- Workload:
  - Class size requirements are changing at Ryerson; Custodial workers are retiring and not being replaced; at Carlton University support staff work more and more overtime as enrollment goes up by no new staff are hired to take on the work.

## *Breakouts*

The last portion of the day – just over an hour – was dedicated to a sit-down by each set of locals from the same university in order to devise an action plan around all these issues. Unfortunately, there were only 2 representatives from York, and only from one local. In the weeks to come the Executive Committee and Stewards' Council of 3903 will be discussing these issues and presenting a plan to the Membership. Immediate plans include calling a Special General Membership Meeting to discuss how to mobilize against Bill 115 – which has severely curtailed the bargaining rights of teachers in the Province – and the proposed , so-called 'Protection of Public Services Act.' In addition, the Exec of 3903 will be joining a

meeting organized by Executive members at 3902 at U of T to discuss this with other Executives of other '39' locals.

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